Shoulder to Shoulder

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Shoulder to Shoulder

by lurkinglurkerwholurks

Summary

It was the first time in Dick didn't know how long that his hand itched to throw something and it wasn't Bruce's fault.

Carried, from Dick's point of view.

——Can be read as a standalone——

Notes

In celebration of my one-year fic-writing anniversary, I allowed followers on Tumblr to request an off-page fic snippet—a different POV of one of the scenes, a peek at what happened after, etc., of any of my finished fics.

This is one of those.

https://lurkinglurkerwholurks.tumblr.com/post/184105188732/new-ask-meme-starting-here-because-it-popped-into

See the end of the work for more notes

It was the first time in Dick didn't know how long that his hand itched to throw something and it wasn't Bruce's fault. Well, maybe it was a little Bruce's fault. Dick's chest was full of sediment, layer after layer of grief, horror, and distress, but beneath it all still burned the little coal of anger that Bruce hadn't called. If Dick hadn't flicked open the Gotham Gazette, if the page hadn't happened to land open on the society pages, if he hadn't glanced down, he never would have known.

Dick felt like he was being punished. *Screw up one brother, shame on you; screw up two...*

He had failed Jason, miserably and completely, he knew that, but shouldn't that knowledge be punishment enough? And whatever, this wasn't about Dick right now, which was the only reason Dick hadn't called Bruce up and chewed him out. Instead, he'd thrown himself into the one fancy suit he owned and sped over to Gotham, thanking his lucky stars that he hadn't volunteered for the holiday shift like he'd planned.

He had pulled up the Manor drive just as Bruce was stepping down the front walk. Bruce was dressed in the Armani suit that worked like a pressuring lean on a shoulder. Not ostentatious, not aggressive, just the understated but deliberate expression of *I am richer than you* that would do more to steamroll anyone he met today than a tight handshake or a punch to the jaw ever could. Alfred stood at the door of today's car, a stately, almost old-fashioned limousine Dick had seen Bruce use only once or twice before. Dick parked, threw open his door, slammed it shut, then strode to meet them.

Bruce hadn't seemed surprised to see him, but then when did he ever? Dick could feel that coal burning red in his chest, flaring as Bruce waited for him to approach, flickering as the snowflakes sank into his skin. He wouldn't fight. Not today.

It was Christmas Eve, after all.

"You should have called," Dick muttered once he reached Bruce.

Bruce's chin rose infinitesimally. "You told me—"

Dick held up a hand. They wouldn't get on this ride today, this whirling teacup of *you told me not to call* and *why are you always so pigheadedly literal.*

"For Tim, Bruce. You should've called."

Bruce eyed him, jaw hard, then nodded once in assent.

“Can I ride with you?” Better to go as a united front, even if they risked picking another quarrel on the ride over.

Bruce, to his credit, didn’t hesitate. “Of course.”

They didn’t talk on the ride over. Dick fidgeted with his cuffs until he caught Bruce looking, then stopped. When they arrived at the cemetery, Bruce held out a hand, blocking Dick’s exit. Dick braced for whatever thought Bruce had been chewing on, but instead, two large, calloused hands reached out and gently straightened his tie.

Dick met Bruce’s eye. On the other side of the car door awaited a funeral with a minister, mourners, and an open grave. They both knew what to expect, both would likely pay for it in their own ways later.

A united front. For Tim.

Dick nodded, once, and Bruce returned the gesture before letting Alfred open the door.

The funeral ended up being even worse than Dick had anticipated, though not for the reasons he thought. It was a sterile funeral, its alleged mourners as dead as its guest of honor. The minister spoke of a life well-lived and cut short, of days not being promised, and of the solemn duty all had to make each moment count, both for themselves and for others. It was a good sermon, but Dick caught women filing their nails, men checking their phones. No one cared. They lived five moments ahead, ten behind, any flight of fancy that wasn’t here and now. This was a social obligation to be fulfilled before the society mixer to follow.

Tim sat at the front, shoulder to shoulder with his father. From their place at the back, Dick could only see a slice of the boy, a peek at slumped shoulders and lank hair. He could remember being where Tim was now, at the edge of a grave looking down into incomprehensible loss and an uncertain future. He remembered leaning into Bruce, then a virtual stranger, and being grateful that he wasn’t alone, that there was someone whose side he could cry into, whose arm could circle around his shoulders, firm and warm.

As best Dick could tell, Jack Drake never so much as looked at his son.

“Bruce,” Dick whispered, but Bruce’s hand rested on his arm, quelling,

silencing. A Batman's touch. *Wait.*

The service ended. The casket was lowered. Jack and Tim began their walk to the care, Jack slipping through the crowd like a shark while Tim trailed in his wake. And then Bruce was there, shrugging on his Brucie persona like an old coat just before stepping into Jack's path.

Dick had forgotten what a relief it could be to have Bruce take charge. He'd forgotten what a marvel it could be to watch his grunting, reclusive guardian oil the gears of Gotham society to get exactly what he wanted.

Now they were at the Manor, Tim in the kitchen with Alfred warming his hands over a cup of tea, and Dick pacing in Bruce's study.

He wanted to throw something. He wanted to break something.

"You have to do something."

Bruce, from his armchair, raised an eyebrow.

Dick let out a harsh noise from the back of his throat. "Don't give me that, Bruce. You heard him. His mom's dead, his dad doesn't care. He's going to be all alone in that house."

"He's here now," Bruce pointed out, much too calmly. "He's not alone. Alfred's with him."

Good old Alfred. The butler had been waiting for them with a change of clothes for Tim—fresh from the dryer, Dick suspected—and an invitation to tea. It made his chest ache, thinking of how many broken little boys Alfred Pennyworth had walked through an unexpected death.

"That's today," Dick argued. "And tomorrow, if Jack doesn't care, which he won't. What a *măgar*." His mother would've washed his mouth out for that one, but it felt good, to throw venom at Jack Drake with his words at least. "But what about after, Bruce?"

"What *about* after, Dick?" Bruce echoed.

Dick fought the urge to tug at his own hair as he paced. "He can't go back there. He's just a kid, and he shouldn't be alone in an empty house. Who's going to look after him, the cleaning lady?"

Bruce's reply was little more than a mumble, "Turned out okay for

me."

"Because you're the picture of mental health," Dick snapped. Then, like all of his flare-ups, the saline rush of guilt swept in and doused his anger. He stopped pacing and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that."

"You did," Bruce countered, his voice placid. "And you're... not wrong. But I am not that boy's guardian. He's not a stray I can..."

Not a stray he could adopt. Like Jason. If Dick closed his eyes, he was certain he would see an empty, backlit domino staring at him from a glass case.

I can do better this time. I have to do better this time.

Dick knelt in front of Bruce's chair so he could look up into Bruce's eyes. This was something he knew well, a sensation as ingrained into him as somersaults and backflips. He would always look up to Bruce, one way or another.

"Let him stay," Dick pleaded quietly. "I'm not saying steal him. I'm saying..."

He let out a watery huff of a laugh. "He thought we were there for Robin, Bruce. Not for him. Not because his mom's dead but because we had a mission."

This was danger, talking about cowl business aboveground, talking about a boy, a kid, who needed Bruce, even if that meant filling a space that should never have been open to begin with.

Dick rested a hand on Bruce's knee. "Let him stay. As Tim, not as anyone else. He needs you, B."

Bruce was already shaking his head and pushing to his feet. Dick could feel his heart fall to the floor.

"He needs Jack Drake." Bruce sighed, and Dick, still on his knees, noticed the lines around his eyes, the silvery hair twinkling at his temples. When had they changed? When had they both grown up and apart?

Bruce held out a hand, and Dick let him help him to his feet.

"I'll be better," Bruce promised quietly, Dick's hand still in his. "He's

welcome here. He's been... welcome. I'll be better about making that clear, from now on."

It wasn't enough. Not for Dick. Not for the grieving, empty-eyed boy down the hall. And not for Bruce, who seemed determined to debride himself of necrotic and healthy tissue alike. But it was a start.

Dick tightened his hand around Bruce's, a hug between two people who had fallen out of practice.

Wuss. The sneer had an Alley cant to it.

Dick leaned in and wrapped his arms around his... his Bruce. "I'll be better, too."

We have to be better this time.

End Notes

The Romani insult Dick uses is pulled from the internet, so if it's wrong, please let me know!

2025 ETA: I've started posting "behind the scenes" looks at the process of writing fics over on Tumblr. Here's the one for this fic: https://lurkinglurkerwholurks.tumblr.com/post/735895500973359104/shoulder-to-shoulder

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!